

A

4480.22.103

D I S C O U R S E

O N

RELIGIOUS INNOVATIONS

PRONOUNCED BY THE REV.

Mr. WALTER BLAKE KIRWAN,

AT HIS EXCELLENCY

THE NEOPOLITAN AMBASSADOR'S CHAPEL,

THE 20TH MARCH, 1786.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

HIS LETTER TO A FRIEND IN GALWAY,

giving his REASONS for quitting the

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

THE SECOND EDITION.


LONDON PRINTED,

AND DUBLIN REPRINTED,

By P. WOGAN, No. 23, On the OLD-BRIDGE.

M.DCC.LXXXVII.



 The following Discourse was delivered in Consequence of a Pamphlet written by a Mr. BARRINTON, a Roman Catholic Clergyman. The Letters marked in Italics are Extracts from the Pamphlet.

A
S E R M O N
ON
RELIGIOUS INNOVATIONS.

In the xviiiith Chapter of St. MATTHEW, Verse
the 17th, are the following Words:

If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church:

*But if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto
thee as a Heathen and a Publican.*

MY FRIENDS,

THERE never perhaps was an age
so liberal and tolerant as the present.
Thanks to the influence of a mild and
unprejudiced government, we enjoy the
exercise of our religion in a peaceful
security. The brand of fanatical sedition

is extinct, and Philanthropy, the first in the heavenly train of virtues, scatters with a full hand the blessings of universal amity and concord. Though the law as yet holds out against us some feeble terrors, we may compare them to weapons which the voice of peace has consigned to the worm and the rust, and have lost their power of mischief, from the wisdom and humanity that distinguish the councils of an enlightened nation, and mark the character of a good and gracious Prince. We should entertain therefore the most grateful sense of the favours and indulgence we have already received; we should look forward with submission, to a greater expansion of legislative bounty, and wait with resignation the auspicious and I hope not far distant period, which by an unlimited emancipation from a long and painful yoke, will restore us to all the rights of freemen. This I believe is the best

and



and only line of conduct we should adopt. It is grounded on a principle of honour and loyalty. To vent the accents of complaint (to give it no harsher name) is imprudent, serves but to betray an intemperate spleen, and gives a sanction to those unmerited imputations we are so justly zealous to disclaim. Yet I remark with a degree of concern, that the few restrictions we still labour under in this country, are sometimes canvassed with too much heat, not unfrequently with a little mixture of acrimony; such observations indeed are rare I think they are improper, I am sure they are ungenerous and impolitic. In saying this I believe I express the general sentiments of a faithful and submissive people. It would be foreign from my present purpose to follow this idea any longer. When I mentioned the happy and very general liberality of opinion which prevailed at this day, the

above reflections flowed as it were imperceptibly from me; but in conformity with the words of my text, I meant only to guard you against the danger of being seduced by a specious name, which is made a stalking horse to cover the most daring attack upon our Holy Religion. Yes, under the glare and parade of liberality of sentiment, the most dangerous spirit of religious innovation is gone forth; it breathes in the midst of you. You will understand me when I tell you, that it has rushed upon the public eye in a modern production, a monster hatched into life within the very precinct of our Sanctuary, rich only in the art of injuring the cause it professes to serve, and mutilating the religion it seems intended to defend.

My Friends, the creed of your Fathers has been handed down to you through a course of near eighteen hun-

hundred years unaltered and unimpaired; if (as the dispicable sophistry of religious refinement would suggest) it has branched into too great a luxuriance, or contracted any excrescence, it is not my province nor is it yours, to seize the pruning knife and hazard by an unskilful operation the vital principal of the trunk. Such experiments are dangerous and unwarrantable, but when attempted by an obscure and insignificant Witling, in the face of the united wisdom of past centuries, they call for a marked and pointed reprobation. I declare I would sooner venerate the errors of the Church, could any have crept into her practice, than by gratifying a miserable itch for scribbling, expose myself to the contempt of every wise and good man, who wishes to walk in the sure and trodden path of his Fathers, and must prefer the respectable and hoary opinions of the earliest Christianity, to the presumptuous novelties
laid

laid down in a paltry and insidious pamphlet.

Believe me my Friends, the transition is easy, often rapid, from the spirit of reform to downright incredulity. Weak minds are quickly susceptible of impressions, especially when they come from authorities they have been taught to look up to with respect, and assent to with submission. Such impressions are always lasting, and too fatally lead to the most deplorable consequences. When once any practice of the Church is brought into contempt, it takes away from her weight; the prejudice is against her; and understandings, that have not been used to look beyond the surface of things, must thereby be laid open to every bolder insinuation that is levelled at her most sacred tenets. Admit even that an established usage of the Church should require a reform, the spirit that
guides

guides her will dictate the mode and season proper for a retrenchment; but it lies not with any private member of her communion, to erect himself into a censor, and controvert the wisdom necessity or propriety, of what she has hitherto thought proper to enjoin. Yet in what terms of sufficient indignation shall I speak of that profaneness, which has branded her ceremonies and discipline with the foul and opprobrious epithets of *pagantry* and *abuse*.

I believe, nay I am confident when I assert, that such ill-founded and scandalous *reflections* are received, even by those who dissent from us, by the thinking and informed part of the Church of England, with the utmost contempt for the person that utters them, with a perfect detestation of his perfidy. What! That a man who styles himself a Roman Catholic, should prune and pare his creed, until

til its original features are no longer distinguishable! That he should attempt to level not *the thin wall of separation*, but the immense and impenetrable barrier which serves us not only from the established code of worship, but from every other sect that has shot up in the wide field of Christianity. Is this the boasted privilege of liberality of sentiment? Can it or ought it to give a colour to inconsistency? Does it possess the power of consolidating contradictory and opposite systems? Does liberality of sentiment tell us that doctrines old as the Gospel, venerable as truth, antiquity and the faith of nations in every quarter of the globe can make them, may be frittered away in compliance with fashion, from pitiful purposes of vanity, the ostentation of a refined philosophy, or the little vulgar ambition of the lowest species of literary fame? Such a sentiment may be popular with
the

the libertine, and draw a stare from the fool, but must be execrable with every individual of sound head and unbiassed heart. Were I convinced my Friends that *many abuses had crept into the vulgar practice of my Church*, and that she had not the wisdom to discern or the virtue to rescind them; were I convinced she had *departed in her discipline from primitive simplicity*, and that her religious ceremonies were *a cumbrous weight of unmeaning pageantry*, the foetus of *imagination*, or the *conception* of folly; at that moment should I renounce all respect for every thing she teaches, utters and approves. But were I bold enough to declare, that any earthly motive, whether to establish *concord*, or to conciliate adverse opinions, could authorise me to make *concessions* in my creed, or that a surrender of any part of it was a glaring sacrifice of the whole; did I assert the *wondrous infallibility* of the Church, to be no more than

than that certainty of truth arising from *an ordinary co-operation*; did I confess that any article of my *belief hung heavy upon my mind*, and demanded not my fullest assent; were I to pronounce the power vested in the See of Rome, not to be of divine institution, but simply a *limited superintendence* revocable at the will of the community; did I seriously utter these assertions, or offer them to the public eye; I might still enter these doors, nay dare to address you from this place, the form of an abjuration might be wanting to compleat my infamy, it could not remove me farther from your communion.

My Friends, I fancy it is not necessary I should assure you that I have no partiality to subjects of this nature. With me it has ever been a settled opinion, that the most important end of instruction from the pulpit, is, to mend and reform the heart, to inspire a love of virtue,
and

and a horror of vice; to paint the one in all the blaze of her native charms, the other in genuine colours of deformity. Such has been my invariable object since I have appeared among you, and such shall it ever be, while the illustrious Personage, * who is charged with the dispensation of the Church's authority, shall think we worthy to announce the word. This is not the language of flattery, it is the language of submission.—Heaven knows, how much I lament that there should arise an emergency which calls upon me to depart from a favourite practice. But when the daring spirit of novelty presents itself to our view, when the most glaring apostacy from the sacred opinions of the Church stalks with unhallowed stride, under the mask of a liberal reform; when the most flattering panegyrics are published on that impious stretch of def-

* Hon. Dr. Talbot Titul, Bish. of London.

potism which violates sanctuaries, and pillages cloisters, tramples on the most sacred ties, and wantonly separates those whom God had brought together ; when individuals of our own communion raise their voices in defence of such abominations, and betray the great cause of religion, with the anointed hand which should be employed to shield and protect it ; when all true submission to the Church of Christ is no more, and is replaced by the pride of worldly wisdom, the rage of singularity, and the licentious liberty of thinking and writing ;—at this fatal hour, an hour big with the destiny of every thing which should be dear and valuable to a true believer, an hour from which we may perhaps date, in this country a beginning mortification in the very vitals of our religion, it becomes the duty of every good shepherd to provide in time for the safety of his flock, to preserve his little sheep from the

the hovering contagion to sound loud the alarm, to point out the wolf under the garment of the lamb, and boldly to stand forth the champion of that faith, which, at the awful hour of his ordination, at the sacred foot of the altar, he solemnly pledged himself to defend. Such, I believe, is the duty of every true Pastor. There are situations in which it is criminal in him to be silent. If ever there was a situation of that nature, it is the one I stand in at this moment. I am the Guide of some of you, and responsible in a degree for the errors of all. I am bound, religiously bound to point them out, I am bound to anticipate every shadow of danger as a guardian of the truth, I am loudly called upon to deliver it to you as I have received it; I may experience obloquy and misrepresentation, but my reward is not here. On you, my Friends, it is incumbent to treasure

up these salutary admonitions; to guard "the faith that is in you" pure and unmutilated; and when the enemy appears, whether in the insinuating address of conversation, or in the borrowed plumage and littering tinsel of written *reflections*, it is incumbent on you to take care that he find you awake, that he find you with the charters of your religion in your hands.

There is a point of general discipline in our Church, which is the subject of much comment, I mean that of performing the public service in Latin. Lest you should be misled by insinuations that at first view might appear plausible, I shall hazard one or two observations. I wish however to avoid every discussion that favours of controversy, as I advance nothing in opposition to those who avowedly dissent from us. They stand upon fair ground, and are
intitled

intitled to respect; provided we are good and virtuous citizens, I believe they are disposed to leave us in peaceable possession of our opinions. My object is only to lay open the perfidy, and combat the depravity of false brethen and licentious teachers; to guard you against the poison of those serpents that lurk in the shadow of our own altars; to warn you, from the example of unnatural children, who attempt the peace of a venerable parent; children nursed in her bosom, fed with her milk, sheltered under her wings! Great God! One would think that an age of seventeen hundred years was entitled to some reverence and respect, and should make even the *infirmities* of *decripitude* sacred. But to our Liturgy:

That of the Western Church has always been in Latin. The Church was planted in the West, whilst subject

to the laws and arms of the Roman Empire. The language of that Empire survived its fall, and is to this day the most universally understood through all Europe. There is no individual of decent education ignorant of it, and in many parts of the Continent, it is familiar even to the Peasantry, such as Hungary, Bohemia, Poland, &c. Yet, as the case is not general, to obviate that inconvenience, the Liturgy is literally translated into every modern language, and those who cannot read, are carefully instructed, by their Ministers, as to the purport and import of divine service. In St. Austin's time, which is generally termed the purer æra of the Church, the Liturgy was in Latin; still he mentions in his 209th letter to Pope Celestin, and many other passages of his works, that in various parts of Africa it was little understood. It is again certain, that on the introduction of Christianity

Christianity into the West, the Vulgar in Germany, France, England, and other northern countries, laboured under the same disadvantage, yet the public service was universally performed and received in Latin. Thus far I conceive the present practice to be *conformable to the sense of antiquity*: nor can I induce myself to believe the alteration so wisely recommended would be *a salutary amendment*. 1st, Because national languages are subject to decay and corruption, and in the space of a century many have undergone a total change as to the meaning and acceptation of words and phrases: The consequence must be, that error and obscurity might insensibly steal into the Liturgy. 2^{dly}, Because in the same kingdom, for instance in this island, which is but a speck upon the expanse of Europe, public service would be read in three different tongues, English, Welsh, and Erse: hence what confusion would
arise.

arise, even in the Liturgy of this nation, in so much, that were one of you to be present at the Mass in Wales, in some parts of Scotland, not to speak of Ireland, you might as well hear it in the language of Indostan. — What inconveniencies would not clergymen labour under! — They would on many occasions, through unacquaintance with the language of this or that particular country, be debarred from the privilege of offering the holy sacrifice, and possibly in circumstances where there existed a necessity of administering the sacrament.

In whatever point of view I consider this matter, I am persuaded that to alter the present practice would be an unwise and dangerous reform. That such a *measure might have been demanded in too insolent a manner* may perhaps be true, but that it has not been acceded to, *because we are irritated by petulant reflections, or not disposed*

disposed to pray in the language of a Luther, a Calvin, or an Elizabeth, is not the case; but because the Church judges it expedient to preserve uniformity in her service, and secure it from change, corruption, and confusion.

Before I dismiss this subject, it may not be improper to rescue our religious ceremonies from the imputation of *pagantry*.—The reflection is unjust, it is unfounded, the sense of every age is against it. From the first dawn of the world we date the use of religious ceremonies. The sons of Adam offered gifts and sacrifices. Noah and the Patriarchs did the same. It is probable they were expressly commanded; it is certain they were approved by the Divinity. The mark of the covenant with Abraham was the ceremony of circumcision. It was the seal of the true religion, the rule to his posterity was made absolute,

absolute, the penalty of omission was death. In the law of Moses what a train of august and mysterious ceremonies, sacrifices, solemnities, libations, how positive and express the injunction to observe them, even to a degree of precision and minuteness, how severe the punishment annexed to an omission! In the religion of Jesus Christ how many sacred ceremonies instituted by himself and authorized by his example! Do we not find his most illustrious miracles ushered in with exterior signs? In the act of giving articulation and hearing to the dumb and deaf man, he puts his fingers in his ears, touches the tip of his tongue, and, rising his eyes to Heaven, pronounces a solemn determination of his power. — We behold him again spitting upon the earth, working with the aid of its moisture a mass of clay, spreading it on the eyes of the blind man, and directing him to wash in the pool of

Siloe.

Siloe. All this *pageantry* was certainly not necessary, nor did it belong to the substance of his prodigies: The God who rides upon the whirlwind and directs the storm, the Master, Arbiter, Father of all nature needed not the frivolous glare of *unmeaning* ceremonies to produce the most wondrous effects.—The simplest motion of his will would have calmed the rage of elements, given light to darkness, and animation to the dead. Still his practice is upon sacred record, and the pen of innovation is not I hope as yet bold enough to contradict or revile it. If there is any faith to be given to the attestations of the primitive writers of Christianity and usages of the Church from the earliest ages, most of the ceremonies practiced in our public service and administration of sacraments are immediately derived from the Apostles.—The Church has judged it expedient to
institute

institute additional ones; her power is from Christ.

The use of ceremonies is to maintain order, decency, and uniformity in the exterior acts of religion, to raise and elevate the mind to a proper contemplation of our mysteries, and to inspire respect and awe for the supreme majesty of God.—How much they conduce to this great object every one's experience bears ample testimony.—The strongest impressions are produced on the mind through the medium of the senses. The animal part of man fetters and clogs the powers of the soul, checks its activity, and blunts the edge of its conception. The sacred pomp of religion was designed therefore as an auxiliary to assist the efforts of the mind, and give a spring to its operations.

This

This, my Friends, is the substance of what I wished to impress; provided you are convinced that the practice of the Church, as well in this as in every other established usage, is founded on the authority of the word, the voice of reason, and the sense of antiquity, the object I had in view is accomplished.

I shall conclude these remarks by repeating a proposition I have already advanced; that the transition is easy, often rapid from the spirit of reform to downright incredulity. Should this unhappy sentiment once prevail among you, Heaven alone knows where it will end. I therefore solemnly counsel you to beware of admitting impressions that may imperceptibly sap the foundations of your faith. If you read the history of the Church, you will find that every innovation upon record began by a

C

gradual

gradual reform, timid in its birth, bolder in its progress, until at last it swelled into a torrent that swept away every scene and bulwark of religion. When impotent and superficial reason rises in opposition to the venerable habits of the most early æras of the church, it stops at nothing, it is the parent of every novelty and error. Thus we see at this day the Christian world deluged with an inundation of religious systems, all contradictory to one another, still all claiming the right of primogeniture.

Such are the unhappy consequences of uncontrouled and impudent innovations. Every one sets himself up as a Cenfor, an Arbiter, in matters of faith, the sense of the scriptures is interpreted tortured by every dreamer, every fanatic, every little Philosophical Pamphleteer; the herd of mankind are bewildered in the

the maze of religions that shoot up a-
round them, the most prevailing and
fashionable of which is that, which pro-
fesses to believe nothing, whose creed is
a *chart blanche*, or, on which no system
appears but that of Epicurus,—

Ede, bibe, dormi, post mortem nulla voluptas.

My Friends, I must again intreat you
to revere the faith of your fathers, to
revere it, not only in substance, but in
form. Let not the rage for singularity
(which is the leading feature of the day)
tempt you to wander from the old road.
The finger of novelty may point to a
more specious way, but a wise and pru-
dent traveller always follows the beaten
path. Fly from the society of modern
sceptics : It is noxious as the touch
of the scorpion, infectious as the breath
of pestilence. Peruse not the page of
innovation, it leads to the precipice :
Trust not the *pageantry* of its elo-
quence ;

quence; the forked adder often lurks under a gaudy flower. Let it not be said, that the gleanings of obscure scribblers shall out-weigh the great and illustrious authorities which in every age of the Church have supported her doctrines, and approved her practice. Look into her records, cast an eye on her venerable abettors, men of the most profound abilities, splendid monuments of learning, men, who after a life spent in the study of nature, in the sublime researches of sciences the most abstruse, yet submitted themselves with the humblest docility to every article and form of our worship; then ask yourselves, who is he who dares set his face against the submission of so many centuries, the cry of a consenting universe? Against a prescription so long, so firmly established, against the practice of Apostles, the voice of Doctors, Fathers, Divines of the universal Church, against
the

the test of traditions sliding down an unbroken chain, whose links are all the great characters of antiquity, the lights of every age, the wisdom of every clime and nation upon the earth !

Christians, I will pursue this subject no farther : I will no longer impede your reflections ; they must operate more forcibly at this moment than any thing I can express. May you continue to be penetrated with a due submission and humble acquiescence to the doctrines and practices of our holy Church ; may the Divine Spirit, which has promised to be with her until the consummation of time, give you grace to revere her decisions, obey her precepts, and imbibe her councils. Let them sink deep into your hearts ; they will conduct you to immortality. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

the roll of tradition falling down as
 unbroken chain, whose links are as
 great characters of antiquity; the light of
 every age, the wisdom of every clime
 and nation upon the earth!

Christians I will pursue this subject no
 further: I will no longer impede your
 reflections; they must operate more nat-
 urally at this moment than any thing I
 can express. May you continue to be
 penetrated with a due regard to all
 humble acquiescence to the doctrines and
 practices of our holy Church; may the
 Divine Spirit which has promised to be
 with her until the consummation of time
 give you grace to receive her teaching
 obey her precepts, and imitate her ex-
 ample. Let their link drop into your hearts
 they will conduct you to immortality in
 the name of the Father of the Son, and

L E T T E R

FROM THE

REV. WALTER BLAKE KIRWAN,

TO A

FRIEND IN GALWAY.

“DEAR SIR,

“THE 17th day of the present month formed an æra in my life; it gave me to the Established Church. I went through the usual ceremonies, in the hands of the Rev. Doctor Hastings, Archdeacon of Dublin, a gentleman of distinguished worth and integrity, and to whom I am peculiarly indebted for every mark of polite-

politeness and attention. I can say the same indeed of some other dignitaries of the church, to whom I had the honour of being introduced.

“ On Sunday next I am to preach at St. Peter’s, and for the first time in a Protestant place of worship. But though I have changed the sphere of my exertions, they shall still be invariably directed to the same object, to improve the human heart, to enlarge and enlighten the understanding of men, banish religious prejudice, and diffuse through society the great blessings of peace, order, and mutual affection. Such I conceive to be the principal duty of every Christian teacher.

“ I can safely say, that in the step I have taken, I have abandoned no particular system; my disapprobation of many of those tenets I had once subscribed to, is long known to you, Sir, and to the rest

rest of my friends——nay, I believe the public in the town of Galway, at least the discerning and intelligent part of them, are well assured (in consequence of those clear and unequivocal declarations I have repeatedly made from the pulpit) that a blind credulity was never a prominent feature of my creed.

“ If I have passed to the church establishment, I have only passed into a situation in which I can better accomplish a desire, which has ever been the next and dearest to my heart, that of rendering more service to the community, and inculcating the pure morality of the Gospel with greater fruit and extent. Upon the clearest and most deliberate reflection, I envisage Christianity in a great measure as a practical institution of religion, designed to regulate the dispositions and improve the characters of men: The
various

various systems, which ignorance, craft, or policy gave birth to, have deluged the world with more evil than the sword of ambition, or all the vicious propensities of human nature. But the day of emancipation from the fetters of mysticism, bigotry, and religious credulity, is rapidly advancing; I look forward with rapture to a period so truly important to the interests of mankind, and if the pleasure which such a prospect affords me, is checked by any painful sensation it is the deep humiliation I feel, from having hitherto been but a feeble and confined instrument in the promotion of a great and glorious work. Let the enthusiast, who is blindly attached to forms, and whose mind is narrowed by idle speculations, say what he will, sure I am, that the individual, who devotes his life to the moral culture, the improvement and happiness of his fellow citizens, (in whatever circle he acts, or temple he raises

raises his voice) must claim at their hands the fullest gratitude. To this assertion every rational, liberal, and enlightened member of the community must subscribe.

“ I doubt not I shall experience on the present occasion, a considerable share of obloquy and misrepresentation ; but I should deem myself unworthy indeed, of standing forth in a situation of public utility, if I did not on my entrance, prepare my mind for such an event. An unmanly respect to the prejudices of the vulgar and ignorant, are considerations I have long soared above ; they cannot—they shall not controul the operations of a soul like mine. While acting in conformity to the dictates of my head and heart, I neither dread the malice of party, or the tooth of the bigot. I am ambitious only of standing well with the truly virtuous and liberal part of mankind : while
the

the general tenor of my life, and efforts in the public service, meet with their countenance and support, I enjoy the leading reward I hope for here beneath ; a steady and unwearied perseverance, will entitle me to one of a superior nature, and in a better place. This is not the language of hypocrisy—it is the honest effusion of a breast, that has ever been superior to disguise and dissimulation. It will undoubtedly be said by many, that I was swayed by the view of temporal advantage and sensual gratification ; to this usual reproach I make this plain and candid answer. I never did set up for a Stoic, nor do I pretend to a greater share of self-denial than the generality of men. If I differ from them in any degree of merit, it is only perhaps in a more than common desire of becoming useful in society, and devoting myself to the general interest. This is no acquired virtue—it is the bent of my nature—it is genial ;
I there-

I therefore freely acknowledge, that I should not look upon myself a Man, were I insensible to the pleasure arising from an unblushing and well-earned fame, were I insensible to the comforts which flow from competence and independence, or that I did not value the freedom of possessing those indisputable and unalienable rights of nature, which she has deeply grafted on the human constitution, and which no divine law ever intended, or inferior authority can arrogate the power to counteract.

“ I have some habits of intimacy, Sir, with characters truly enlarged and respectable, both in the town of Galway, and the adjacent countries; and it is no small consolation to me at this moment, to flatter myself that I shall not lose one inch of ground in the esteem of any individual who knows me well, or has honour-

D

ed

ed me with his friendship. As Galway is the place of my birth, and the sphere of my natural connections, my heart points forcibly thither, and feels the animated wishes for its happiness, prosperity and welfare. Though probably it will never again be the place of my residence, yet I shall always recollect with the truest gratitude, the very flattering distinction I have been favoured with, and every step it may hereafter make in opulence, commerce, or intellectual refinement, will produce feelings in my breast, which I would blush to avow that any force of language, or strength of colouring would express. I do however propose, before the expiration of the present summer, paying my friends there a short visit, and taking occasion to assure the public, in a place where they have more room than in a small chapel that a change of system has not robbed me of
the

the milder affections of the soul; and that I have not forgot to plead in behalf of the unfortunate.

“ I have the honour to subscribe myself,

“ Dear Sir,

“ Your sincere friend

“ and humble servant,

“ WALTER BLAKE KIRWAN.”

Dublin, June 19, 1787.

F I N I S.



